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Understanding ‘good vibe’ atmospheres in coworking spaces

Louise Suckley³, Alexandra Bernhardt⁴ & Abbas Shieh⁵

Purpose: This paper explores what is meant by a ‘good vibe’ atmosphere, an area of significant importance identified in previous studies on user preferences in coworking spaces and an aspect that can determine the success or failure of a place.

Methodology: An online survey was used to collect the responses of 148 coworkers across Europe and the Middle East on 28 variables measuring the importance of social and material elements that shape a ‘good vibe’ atmosphere (Cronbach alpha coefficient 0.879). Analysis was undertaken using principal component analysis and multiple regression.

Findings: ‘Good vibe’ atmospheres are sensed at two distinct levels: an explicit, conscious appreciation of primarily material elements and a deeper, implicit understanding centred on the social purpose of coworking. At the explicit level, survey participants rated material elements such as natural light, communal areas and a variety of workspaces as the most important contributors to a ‘good vibe’. At the implicit level, regression analysis showed that the Social community component was at the atmospheric core, including elements such as having a sense of community, conversations, or social and work-related events. Material elements and strategies that create the component Communal spaces, including spaces for non-work activities or connections to nature, also made a significant contribution to a ‘good vibe’ atmosphere. These elements and strategies require curation and an active contribution from both providers and users.

Originality: This paper contributes a conceptual model of ‘good vibe’ atmospheres in coworking spaces. It extends the sociomateriality perspective that suggests complete things and their entanglements by adding an atmospheric lens to consider the ‘in-between’ and ‘no-things’ that are neither fully material nor purely subjective. The outcome is a more comprehensive understanding of this everyday sense-making.

Practical implications: The importance of both material and social elements to users is presented alongside recommendations to support the curation of ‘good vibe’ atmospheres in shared working locations.

Keywords: atmospheres; coworking spaces; vibe; sociomateriality

Introduction

“I went in and... it was a ghost town. There was maybe two dozen people in there. Where last time I went, there was 400 people, and it was a massive buzz and people were talking around the coffee bar and playing ping pong... Now it's... two dozen people all sat in their quiet corners not engaging with each other. I think the buzz of coworking has kind of gone.” (UK coworker, 2022)

This quote was collected shortly after the reopening of coworking spaces (CWS) following the Covid-19 pandemic and shows specific user expectations for these locations which were not being met.

CWS are defined as shared working spaces used by location-independent unaffiliated knowledge workers (Rådman *et al.*, 2023; Orel and Bennis, 2021) that provide opportunities for knowledge exchange and a working community (Weijts-Perrée *et al.*, 2019). Previous research on CWS user preferences and expectations has identified a ‘vibrant and creative atmosphere’ (Appel-Meulenbroek *et al.*, 2021), ‘good groove’ or ‘productive buzz’ (Endrissat and Leclercq-Vandelannoitte, 2021) as a key requirement. Apart from a few qualitative studies (Bernhardt, 2023; Orel and Alonso Almeida, 2019; Waters-Lynch and Duff, 2021), no quantitative research has yet dissected this specific elusive atmosphere.

In examining the above quote, the ‘buzz’ is created through the presence of others, sounds of conversations, availability of coffee bars, play equipment and being near others. CWS are attempting to reinvigorate their offer since the pandemic to rekindle the ‘buzz’ as this can often determine the success or failure of a place in stimulating repeat usage and sharing experiences with others. Strategies being used by CWS include adding meeting rooms, private offices and flexible desks in open workspaces, alongside services such as gyms, greenhouses and pet amenities (Deskmag, 2023). However, it is unclear whether these strategies will create the atmosphere so desired by CWS users.

In this research, we unpack what coworkers mean by the felt, situated and often difficult to articulate ‘good vibe’ through examining the importance they assign to different aspects of the CWS offer in contributing to this type of atmosphere. We situate the research in the literature of spatial atmospheres and build upon the work of Böhme (1993) and Bernhardt (2023) to develop a conceptual model that considers CWS in their

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construction, incorporating ‘perceived objects’: material elements (e.g. communal areas and background music); social elements (e.g. other coworkers, community hosts); and curated strategies (e.g. social events, open plan design); alongside coworkers as ‘constructors of space’, ‘perceiving subjects’ and as co-creators of atmospheres.

We adopt a sociomateriality lens (Orlikowski and Scott, 2008) to explore the relationality between these social and material elements and strategies, taking into consideration human understanding that includes emotions, values and experience as well as symbolic and cultural viewpoints, to examine the importance assigned. By combining the sociomateriality lens, which suggests fullness, complete things and their entanglements, alongside an atmospheric lens, that addresses the ungraspable, undiscernible ‘in-between’, we develop a nuanced understanding of this relational phenomenon but with practical implications.

We present the results of a survey completed between 2022-2023 with a sample of 148 coworkers across Europe and the Middle East, which contributes to the largely qualitative body of research. The importance that coworkers assigned to various social and material features are examined using the sociomateriality and atmospheric lens to provide an understanding of strategies used to create the ‘good vibe’. We use principal component analysis and multiple regression analysis to examine the underlying relationships between material and social features and the extent to which they predict the ‘good vibe’. Alongside this we consider demographics in our analysis to establish the influence of the sociocultural context on ‘good vibe’ ratings supporting a sociomateriality lens.

The paper will firstly examine the concept of atmospheres and its construction in CWS, before moving on to consider sociomateriality and its application to CWS. This is summarised in a conceptual model to bring together our exploration of the ‘good vibe’ concept. Following this, we present the methodology, and results which are discussed using a combined sociomateriality and atmospheric lens to highlight the elements that are explicitly important to coworkers and the underlying relational phenomena that emerges as a ‘good vibe’ atmosphere. We then present recommendations for making practical use of the findings in CWS, and future research.

Our exploratory research is structured around addressing the research question: How do material and social features contribute towards creating a ‘good vibe’ in CWS?

Conceptualising the ‘vibe’: atmospheres and coworking

In everyday language, and also when talking to coworkers, the term ‘vibe’ is used interchangeably with other expressions such as atmosphere, but also mood, buzz, ambiance, or groove (Endrissat and Leclercq-Vandelannoitte, 2021), yet these terms should not be treated as conceptually equivalent. We understand ‘vibe’ as an emic and vernacular expression through which coworkers name a felt, situated and often difficult-to-articulate quality of a CWS. ‘Atmosphere’, by contrast, is the analytical concept through which we theorise this quality as constituted by perceiving subjects and the perceived space, including bodies, material arrangements, spatial settings, sensory cues and social practices (Böhme, 1993; Anderson, 2009; Griffero, 2016). We therefore use ‘good vibe’ as the empirical entry point into coworkers’ everyday sense-making, while using ‘atmosphere’ to analyse how such felt qualities are constituted and experienced.

Research has considered spatial atmospheres or the affective dimension of spaces in what ‘hits us’ when entering a room and how the space makes us feel (Beyes and Holt, 2020). The atmosphere of a place can be seen as the perceived outward effect of social and material elements in their spatial arrangement (Löw, 2016).

Böhme (1993, p. 114) proposed that atmosphere is “the peculiar intermediary status ... between subject and object”. The atmosphere is what happens ‘in-between’ the perceiving subjects and the perceived objects; they express the relationship of states of mind and environmental, social and material qualities (Böhme, 1993). With this understanding, Böhme attributes a certain quasi-objectivity to atmospheres - although atmospheres are perceived subjectively, they are intersubjectively experiential.

Against this theoretical understanding, Bernhardt (2023) discusses the atmospheres of CWS as the ‘in-between’ of the (perceived) space which is composed through material features such as large desks or communal areas, and the social elements such as other coworkers or community hosts. The (perceiving) subjects are the CWS users, who experience the space and construct an understanding of the objects. Atmospheres are constituted by both the perceiving subject (here CWS users) and the perceived object (social and material aspects of CWS) and not as something third between subject and object (Böhme, 1993).

Building on this understanding of CWS atmospheres, we connect our study to the broader literature of Management and Organisation Studies (MOS) on atmosphere and organising. Beyond philosophical and

sociological discussions of atmosphere, MOS increasingly conceptualise atmospheres as constitutive elements of organising rather than as passive backgrounds. Atmospheres are theorised as ‘quasi-things’ (Griffero, 2017) or ‘half-things’ (Schmitz, 2014), in line with the understanding outlined above: they are neither physical objects nor mere subjective feelings, but in-between forces that shape organisational life (Jørgensen and Beyes, 2023). Atmospheres are further understood as relational phenomena that emerge through ongoing relations among bodies, material arrangements, spatial settings, aesthetic practices and everyday ways of working (Jørgensen, 2019). Technology also shapes the organisational atmosphere, as it can be especially seen in CWS (Endrissat and Leclercq-Vandelannoitte, 2021).

The actual experience of space is also pre-structured by the manipulation of sensory stimuli (Illouz, 2017) where the spatial objects are consciously pre-arranged to achieve a perceived outward effect. This is done through staging work (Löw, 2016) or aesthetic work (Böhme, 1993) where the social and material elements are arranged or curated to evoke specific ‘vibes’ by the coworking hosts (Bernhardt, 2023). An interesting example in the context of collaborative spaces is the case of a silent atmosphere that is not only produced through the absence of noise, but also desks and chairs are arranged, so that the coworkers can’t see each other, there are white walls and no disturbing decoration, or there is a sign at the closed door, that says it’s the silent space (Bernhardt, 2023). This pre-arrangement leads to silence-supporting activities by the coworkers including body postures focused on the screen, preventing eye contact, or wearing headphones (de Vaujany *et al.*, 2019).

MOS literature also commonly distinguishes analytically between the staging or production of atmospheres on the one hand, and their reception or sensing on the other (Jørgensen, 2019). This distinction is useful for our study, which examines the ‘good vibe’ from the perspective of coworkers as perceiving subjects while also considering the social and material strategies through which coworking hosts seek to curate it. For this research, we are building upon the work of Bernhardt (2023) who has discussed curating atmospheres, by focusing on the creation specifically of a ‘good vibe’ atmosphere.

Sociomaterial perspective

The sociomateriality perspective argues that there is an entangled relationality between the social and material. They are not independent entities; one does not exist without the other. Social and material are constitutively entangled in practice (Orlikowski and Scott, 2008) and human activity cannot be separated from settings, technologies and material objects. Instead, there is an

intra-action and overlapping (Fenwick *et al.*, 2011) that emerges in practice. This perspective suggests an ontology of fullness, of complete things and their entanglements. However, an atmospheric lens suggests the ‘in-between’, the ungraspable, the indiscernible, and the unknowable — non-events and no-things that still carry significance (see de Vaujany, 2025; Giovannoni and Quattrone, 2025; Jørgensen and Beyes, 2023). This leans into Whitehead’s (1968) ‘culture of possibilities’ where reality is not a set of fixed facts and what is given, it is instead an ongoing process defined also by what might have been and might yet be. For example, a view from the window is not a thing in any strict material sense, but it can open the way to non-events, half-things and no-things - possibilities perceived as such. Being seated next to a window makes it possible not to rely on artificial light, not to feel entirely alone, not to feel completely disconnected from the breath of the city, as much as it enables other things to unfold.

This research therefore extends sociomateriality to consider the ‘in between’, ‘half-things’ that are neither fully material nor purely subjective, as well as the no-things - possibilities that carry significance in creating the ‘in-between’ that is atmosphere.

With the sociomateriality perspective, there are certain affordances of material objects (Latour, 2005) in what the object invites or can do. For example, the physical properties of a chair can be made up of the material fabric, size and density and can be used to sit, but affordances go beyond simply the action that is possible with the object. According to Symon and Pritchard (2015, p.244) “the capacity for action comes from the enmeshing of material affordances, human understanding, situated practices and cultural discourses as a sociomaterial assemblage”. These sociocultural interpretations of the material bring in emotions, values and experience. In the case of the chair it can be used for seating, but other social understandings can be around its ergonomic design for a more comfortable working experience; a professional stature from a formal seating position; wheels suggest movement; lower seating can invite relaxation. The half-things and no-things possibilities of an ‘office’ chair could include a professional mindset to complete work, a grounded working experience, or concerns for back pain and a source of distraction impacting on the task at hand.

In adopting the sociomaterial lens, we consider the perspectives of CWS users as the perceiving subjects, who are sensing the material and the intangible social elements included in CWS in their construction. Users are not simply passive observers of the material and social elements. Rather, the elements are sensed in their entirety

using sociocultural interpretations along with ‘half-things’ and ‘no-things’ possibilities, which in turn shapes the perceived atmosphere. This entanglement and enmeshing of the subject with the object and non-object, is what can be captured through exploring the sociomaterial assemblages of CWS using an atmospheric lens.

Coworking spaces in their construction

CWS users as perceiving subjects comprise of independent knowledge workers and freelancers (Mitev *et al.*, 2019); entrepreneurs and start-ups (Bouncken *et al.*, 2021); and increasingly employees of firms (Aumüller-Wagner and Baka, 2023). Different types of CWS have been identified to support this range of users, which according to the taxonomy developed by Orel and Bennis (2021) comprises: individual-purposed spaces focused on freelancers and independent professionals; creation-purposed spaces such as makerspaces; group-purposed spaces for teams often used by larger firms; and startup-purposed spaces akin to business incubators. Despite the variation, all align to an extent with the core values of coworking (openness, collaboration, sustainability, accessibility, and community; Coworking.com, n.d.) and are designed as shared working spaces.

In considering CWS in their construction, several authors have examined user needs and preferences (c.f. Rådman *et al.*, 2023; Appel-Meulenbroek *et al.*, 2021; Weijs-Perrée *et al.*, 2019) and find key requirements to be location, contract options, networking opportunities, community and a vibrant atmosphere. Our research develops this broader view of CWS by specifically examining the characteristics that comprise the vibrant or ‘good vibe’ atmosphere that is so important for encouraging repeat usage - vital to CWS continued operation.

Adopting the sociomateriality lens, the material elements of CWS can be understood to be complete physical entities such as furniture e.g. large tables, desk chairs, standup workbenches (Bouncken *et al.*, 2021); technology, digital tools, and hardware such as printers and screens (Endrissat and Leclercq-Vandelannoitte, 2021). These elements are relational to create a material strategy that aims to be affectively perceived as a specific aesthetic or narrative and can include the spatial layout e.g. size, open plan design, meeting rooms, refreshment areas; and how they are designed e.g. décor, lighting, planting and natural lighting (Bouncken *et al.*, 2021). A sociocultural understanding of this CWS materiality brings in coworkers as constructors and perceivers of spaces who interpret the possibilities which have been examined to some extent by others. The material strategy of using an open-plan spatial layout is common in CWS (Orel and Bennis, 2021; Bouncken and Aslam, 2023) as this aims to create a sense of transparency and openness (Turco, 2016)

and supports the facilitation and possibilities of encounters through visibility (Shortt, 2018). However, open-plan layouts can also produce impressions of control, through lack of privacy, distractions and constant visibility creating feelings of power and intimidation (Baldry and Barnes, 2012).

In sensing the atmosphere in its entirety, the curation of the CWS soundscape is a further material strategy. This can include speech noise, footsteps, phones ringing and often unwanted sounds due to their unpredictable duration which can lead to the possibility of distraction and reduced concentration (Orel and Alonso Almeida, 2019). To help reduce this possibility, some CWS take control of their soundscape and play music or natural sounds such as birdsong or water. Orel and Alonso Almeida (2019) found that background music in CWS helped to tackle distractions that can appear in open plan work environments by masking social noise and giving people the confidence to have conversations without fear of distracting others.

Social elements in CWS bring in the interpretations and understandings of discernible actions and activities, and can include the presence of other users (regular or new), having planned and unplanned conversations and are one of the key motivations for using CWS (Rådman *et al.*, 2023; Weijs-Perrée *et al.*, 2019). Social strategies are the curation of social elements through the aesthetic work of the coworking host. This includes giving tours, running social events, such as breakfast clubs or quiz nights; work-related events, such as training, users sharing project work or external business speakers (de Vaujany *et al.*, 2019).

The sociocultural interpretation of these CWS social elements and strategies has been previously examined. Blagoev *et al.*, (2019) found coworkers gained a sense of informality from participating in events leading them to share knowledge and ideas and creating a sense of self-control, choice and individual power. They also found that co-locating developed a sense of ‘co-discipline’ through comparing productivity and is a view supported by others (Perriton, 2023; Bernhardt, 2023). This aligns with the concept of ‘relational energy’ identified by Owens *et al.*, (2016) where individuals can be energised by others through a shared experience that can heighten emotions and influence behaviour such as working harder or complete demotivation.

Several authors have also considered the sociocultural interpretation of having a sense of community in CWS, that arises from being co-present, co-located and the inevitable opportunities for social interactions,

knowledge sharing and collaboration (Waters-Lynch and Duff, 2021; Parrino, 2015; Merkel, 2015). The immaterial labour undertaken by coworkers is described as ‘affective commoning’ by Waters-Lynch and Duff (2021) to depict the personal and professional relational contributions of coworkers; Blagoev *et al.* (2019) discussed the sense of shared commitment; and Garrett *et al.* (2017) found this to create a sense of belonging, mutual care, identity and support. This affective relationality builds an intangible, ungraspable socially constructed collective without which there can be feelings of isolation and unproductivity.

Conceptual Framework

In this research we aim to disentangle the highly complex situated practice of atmospheres in CWS through a quantitative survey design. We specifically focus on an atmosphere that is perceived as a ‘good vibe’ which is identified as a key user requirement (Weijs-Perrée *et al.*, 2019; Appel-Meulenbroek *et al.*, 2021) and leads users to dwell in the space, work well and build a sense of belonging (Bernhardt, 2023). Considering the above and following the work of Bernhardt (2023), the ‘vibe’ in CWS can be examined from different angles. It can be focussed on exploring the ‘perceived object’ - how the social and material are arranged in the context of staging or aesthetic work undertaken by coworking hosts to create certain vibes; alternatively from the view of the ‘perceiving subject’ and how the social and material is experienced by coworkers as constructors of space. This is depicted visually in Figure 1 which presents the conceptual framework of this paper. We focus on the perceiving subject - coworkers as constructors of spaces, their everyday sense-making and sociocultural understanding of perceived social and material elements and strategies for creating the ‘in-between’ empirical entry point of a ‘good vibe’.

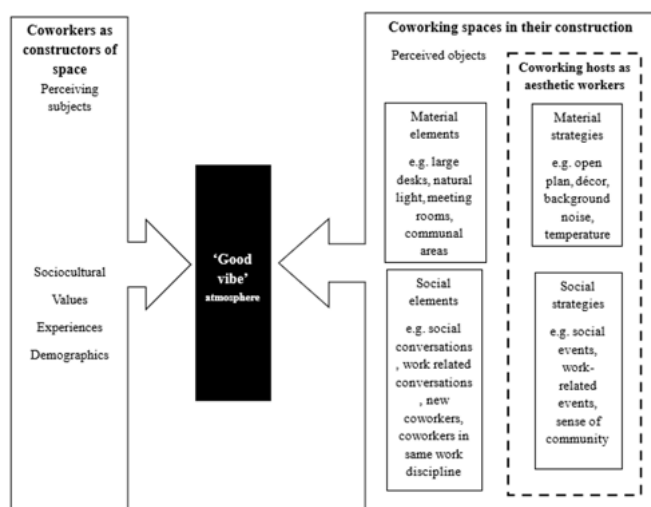


Figure 1. ‘Good vibe’ conceptual framework
(Source: Authors’ own work)

Methodology

The study uses a quantitative methodology to address the dearth of data of this nature on atmospheres. Through a survey, we can remove ourselves as researchers from the context and collect more objective data on a topic we recognise as being subjective. In adopting this approach, we can also gather views from a much larger sample that can support a more reliable and generalisable measure.

Following ethical approval, a questionnaire was designed to encapsulate the conceptual framework. A 5-point Likert scale was used to collect views on the importance of various elements and strategies in their contribution to creating a ‘good vibe’, ranging from 1 for ‘Not important at all’ to 5 for ‘Very important’. The conceptual framework defined through the literature was used to guide the questionnaire design to measure ‘CWS in their construction’ (see Table 1). 13 items were included on ‘social elements’ such as conversations with new people, and ‘social strategies’ such as having a sense of community. 15 items were included on ‘material elements’ such as availability of individual desks, and ‘material strategies’ curated by the coworking host such as open plan layout. A question used as the dependent variable was included to ascertain the overall importance of having a ‘good vibe’ in CWS. The instrument yielded a Cronbach alpha reliability coefficient of 0.879, which meets the acceptable threshold of between 0.6 and 0.9 (Wallen and Fraenkel, 2013). Demographic data was gathered to understand the perceiving subjects or ‘constructors of space’ and ascertain the influence of age, gender, geographic location, employment type and CWS usage.

Variable	Supporting CWS literature
Material elements	
Availability of different types of working spaces (e.g. desks, breakfast bar, comfy seating, tall seating)	Bouncken <i>et al.</i> , 2020; Appel-Meulenbroek <i>et al.</i> 2021; Weijs-Perrée <i>et al.</i> , 2019.
Availability of large desks for more people to work at	Bouncken <i>et al.</i> , 2020; Orel and Alonso Almeida, 2019; Weijs-Perrée <i>et al.</i> , 2019.
Availability of individual desks	Bouncken <i>et al.</i> , 2020; Orel and Alonso Almeida, 2019; Weijs-Perrée <i>et al.</i> , 2019.
Communal areas e.g. kitchens, coffee areas	Bouncken <i>et al.</i> , 2020; Appel-Meulenbroek <i>et al.</i> , 2021; Weijs-Perrée <i>et al.</i> , 2019.
Spaces focused on non-work activities e.g. gym, yoga, bar	Cabral and van Winden 2020; Weijs-Perrée <i>et al.</i> , 2019.
Availability of technical equipment and support e.g. printers, scanners, photocopiers, Wifi	Bouncken <i>et al.</i> , 2020; Endrissat and Leclercq-Vandelannoitte, 2021
Digital channel for the coworking space (e.g. blog, online community, Slack channel)	Bouncken <i>et al.</i> , 2020; Endrissat and Leclercq-Vandelannoitte, 2021

Material strategies	
Open plan design of space	Bouncken <i>et al.</i> , 2020; Orel and Bennis, 2021; Bouncken and Aslam, 2021; Appel-Meulenbroek <i>et al.</i> , 2021; Jackonen <i>et al.</i> , 2017
Availability of meeting rooms	Bouncken <i>et al.</i> , 2020; Deskmag, 2022
Background noise	Orel and Alonso Almeida, 2019
Background music	Orel and Alonso Almeida, 2019
Natural light	Suharjanto <i>et al.</i> , 2020; Orel and Alonso Almeida, 2019
Connections to nature (e.g. planting, water)	Suharjanto <i>et al.</i> , 2020; Orel and Alonso Almeida, 2019
Temperature	Orel and Alonso Almeida, 2019
Updated bulletin boards/ ideas board	Bouncken <i>et al.</i> , 2020; Endrissat and Leclercq-Vandelannoitte, 2021
Social elements	
Being able to have social conversations	Blagoev <i>et al.</i> , 2019; Appel-Meulenbroek <i>et al.</i> , 2021; Rådman <i>et al.</i> , 2023
Regular conversations with the same coworkers	Rådman <i>et al.</i> 2023
Conversations with new people	Orel and Alonso Almeida, 2019
Conversations with people working on similar projects to you	Appel-Meulenbroek <i>et al.</i> , 2021
Conversations with people working on different projects to you	Appel-Meulenbroek <i>et al.</i> , 2021; Parrino, 2015;
Conversations with the coworking space/ community manager	Merkel, 2015; de Vaujany <i>et al.</i> , 2019
Having unplanned conversations with people	Parrino, 2015; Merkel, 2015
Sharing work-related knowledge and experiences	Merkel, 2015; de Vaujany <i>et al.</i> , 2019
A regular flow of new people	Orel and Alonso Almeida, 2019
Relationships with coworkers you can trust	Rådman <i>et al.</i> , 2023; Orel and Alonso Almeida, 2019
Social strategies	
Availability of work-related events (e.g. training, business speakers)	Appel-Meulenbroek <i>et al.</i> 2021
Availability of social events	Bouncken <i>et al.</i> , 2020; Blagoev <i>et al.</i> , 2019; Appel-Meulenbroek <i>et al.</i> , 2021
Having a sense of community	Bouncken <i>et al.</i> , 2020; Appel-Meulenbroek <i>et al.</i> , 2021; Rådman <i>et al.</i> , 2023; Parrino, 2015; Merkel, 2015

Table 1. Research variables
(Source: Authors' own work)

The survey was conducted online and was distributed via social media and through CWS community hosts providing access to their members. Due to research being conducted in different regions in Europe and the Middle East, the survey was provided in English, German and Farsi. Data collection was conducted between June 2022 - May 2023, at which point 238 responses were collected.

Following data cleansing a sample of 148 responses remained.

Descriptive statistics were used to establish the importance of the 28 independent variables on social and material elements/ strategies in contributing to a 'good vibe'. To show the degree of difference between the various elements of CWS atmospheres, principal components analysis was used to extract the loadings where Kaiser criterion had Eigenvalues >1. To improve interpretability, varimax rotation was applied (Kaiser, 1958) to maximise the variance shared among the items while remaining uncorrelated. A factor loading threshold of 0.40 was used to determine meaningful relationships. Following this, the principal component factors were used as variables for multiple regression. This analysis was used to determine the relationship between the principal components as the independent predictor variables and the dependent variable of overall importance of 'good vibe' atmospheres. Regression assumptions were assessed including independence of errors (Durbin-Watson statistic) and multicollinearity (VIF < 10; tolerance >1). Robustness of the findings, and sociocultural influences, were examined through the use of demographic control variables to check the observed results. Dummy variables were created for gender (male vs. female), age (18-34 yrs vs. more than 35 yrs), employment type (entrepreneur vs. corporate), location (Western regions vs. non-Western regions) and use of CWS per week (1-2 days vs. 3-7 days) to assess for their influence on the interpretations of CWS atmospheres. The use of controls allows a true understanding of CWS atmospheres independent of demographics to establish universality (Carlson and Wu, 2012).

Results

Table 2 outlines the profile of participants and shows the most common age was 25-34 years (33.8%) with slightly more female respondents (54.7%) than males (43.2%). The largest proportion were from the UK (48.6%) and tended to be employed by a larger company (11 or more employees) (52.7%). In terms of time spent using CWS during the week, there was an even distribution, showing a good spread of experience.

Overall (N=148)		Description	
Share %	Frequency	Categories	Characteristics
6.8	10	18-24	Age
33.8	50	25- 34	
27.7	41	35-44	
18.9	28	45-54	

10.8	16	55-64	Gender
1.4	2	65	
0.7	1	Unknown	
43.2	64	Male	
54.7	81	Female	Country
0.7	1	Non-binary / third gender	
1.4	2	Unknown	
48.6	72	UK	
6.1	9	Iran	Employment status
27.0	40	Germany	
2.0	3	Switzerland	
2.7	4	USA	
1.4	2	Spain	Country
2.0	3	Italy	
4.2	6	Other	
6.1	9	Unknown	
16.2	24	Self-employed/ Freelancer	Employment status
15.5	23	Entrepreneur	
15.5	23	Employee of company (2-10 employees)	

Table 2. Profile of participants
(Source: Authors' own work)

Table 3 shows the respondents' mean importance scores for the social and material variables. Generally, the highest mean importance score was assigned to material elements including natural light (mean = 4.19), communal areas (mean = 4.12) and availability of technical equipment (mean = 4.11). Background music (mean = 2.24) and background noise (mean = 2.59) had the most minor importance in contributing towards creating a 'good vibe'. The mean importance score of having a 'good vibe' in a CWS (mean = 3.94) demonstrates the positive regard that respondents allocated to finding the 'right' atmosphere.

Description	n	Mean	Std. Deviation	Mean Difference	t-value	Sig. (2-tailed) a
Natural light	141	4.19	0.89	1.19	15.97	0.00
Communal areas e.g. kitchens, coffee areas	141	4.12	0.91	1.12	14.68	0.00

Availability of technical equipment and support e.g. printers, scanners, photocopiers, Wi-Fi	141	4.11	0.97	1.11	13.56	0.00
Temperature	139	4.06	0.79	1.06	15.84	0.00
Availability of meeting rooms	141	4.04	0.92	1.04	13.50	0.00
Availability of different types of working spaces (e.g. desks, breakfast bar, comfy seating, tall seating)	141	3.88	0.93	0.88	11.23	0.00
Availability of individual desks	140	3.83	0.97	0.83	10.14	0.00
Being able to have social conversations	150	3.81	0.93	0.81	10.60	0.00
Having a sense of community	148	3.80	1.03	0.80	9.42	0.00
Relationships with coworkers you can trust	147	3.74	1.09	0.74	8.23	0.00
Connections to nature (e.g. planting, water)	141	3.70	1.00	0.70	8.26	0.00
Sharing work-related knowledge and experiences	148	3.57	1.08	0.57	6.41	0.00
Conversations with people working on similar projects	148	3.54	1.11	0.54	5.93	0.00
Regular conversations with the same coworkers	150	3.50	0.94	0.50	6.52	0.00
Having unplanned conversations with people	147	3.45	1.10	0.45	4.95	0.00
Open plan design of space	141	3.38	0.99	0.38	4.51	0.00
Availability of large desks for more people to work at	140	3.34	1.13	0.34	3.59	0.00
Conversations with new people	149	3.28	1.03	0.28	3.35	0.00

Conversations with the coworking space/ community manager	147	3.19	1.18	0.19	1.95	0.05
Conversations with people working on different projects	148	3.16	1.02	0.16	1.86	0.06
Digital channel for the coworking space (e.g. blog, online community, Slack channel)	140	3.16	1.17	0.16	1.60	0.11
Availability of social events	148	3.03	1.18	0.03	0.35	0.73
Availability of work-related events (e.g. training, business speakers)	147	3.00	1.17	0.00	0.00	1.00
Updated bulletin boards/ ideas board	140	2.95	1.11	-0.05	-0.53	0.59
Spaces focussed on non-work activities e.g. gym, yoga, bar	140	2.84	1.15	-0.16	-1.69	0.09
A regular flow of new people	148	2.62	1.07	-0.38	-4.30	0.00
Background noise	141	2.59	1.24	-0.41	-3.95	0.00
Background music	139	2.24	1.23	-0.76	-7.26	0.00
a. One-sample t-test with test value=3 **p < 0.01 (2-tailed)						

Table 3. Mean importance (independent variables)
(Source: Authors' own work)

In the principal components analysis with varimax rotation, sampling adequacy was confirmed by the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure (KMO = 0.79) and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was significant, $\chi^2(378) = 1528.010$, $p < .001$, indicating suitability for factor analysis (Field, 2022). The analysis identified six components (Table 4) that explained 59.17% of total variance which is close to 60% acceptable level (Hair *et al.*, 2019). Component 1 (named Social community) showed strong loadings including having a sense of community (.763), unplanned conversations (.758) and availability of social events (.713). Component 2 (named Communal spaces) captured the material elements including spaces for non-work activities (.650), connections to nature (.626) and different types of working spaces (.602). Component 3 (named Operational support) was defined by high loadings on

meeting rooms (.753), technical equipment support (.701) and updated bulletin boards (.562). Component 4 (named Trusted relationships) captured conversations with people on similar projects (.689), relationships with trusted coworkers (.622) and regular conversations with the same coworkers (.566). Component 5 (named Physical comfort) showed strong loadings with natural light (.733), temperature (.695) and availability of individual desks (.550). Finally, component 6 (named Soundscape) captured background music (.767) and background noise (.712).

Internal consistency was evaluated for each component prior to entering them into the multiple regression analysis. Cronbach alpha indicated variable but acceptable reliability across the components (ranged $\alpha = .555-.891$). Component 1 showed excellent reliability ($\alpha = .891$) and Components 2–4 were acceptable for research purposes ($\alpha = .691-.700$). Although Components 5 and 6 ($\alpha = .555-.611$) fell below the .60 threshold, their retention was considered appropriate for exploratory analysis given the small number of items within each factor (DeVellis, 2017). These component scores were retained for regression analysis with the limitations of lower reliability acknowledged.

	Component					
	1 "Social Community"	2 "Comm unal Spaces"	3 "Oper ational Support"	4 "Tru sted Rela tions hips"	5 "Phy sical Com fort"	6 "Sou ndsc ape"
Having a sense of community	.763	.203	.041	.132	-.066	-.007
Having unplanned conversations with people	.758	-.035	-.211	.137	.112	.093
Availability of social events	.713	.326	.168	-.047	-.084	-.075
Conversations with the coworking space/ community manager	.711	-.115	.195	.071	-.044	.061
Conversations with new people	.667	.072	-.106	.323	.025	.154
Being able to have social conversations	.665	.201	.010	.276	-.025	-.207
Availability of work related events (e.g. training, business speakers)	.658	.080	.196	-.143	-.284	.146

A regular flow of new people	.639	.108	-.128	.102	.078	.269
Conversations with people working on different projects to you	.627	.048	.114	.397	-.026	.137
Sharing work-related knowledge and experiences	.532	.008	.266	.457	.160	.059
Spaces focussed on non-work activities e.g. gym, yoga, bar	.060	.650	.247	-.135	-.212	.097
Connections to nature (e.g. planting, water)	.092	.626	-.078	-.076	.406	.185
Availability of different types of working spaces (e.g. desks, breakfast bar, comfy seating, tall seating)	.091	.602	.301	.239	.159	.088
Availability of large desks for more people to work at	-.058	.566	.133	.464	.038	.202
Open plan design of space	.265	.559	-.130	.299	.114	-.019
Communal areas e.g. kitchens, coffee areas	.327	.449	.273	-.215	.176	-.302
Availability of meeting rooms	-.001	.103	.753	.036	.215	-.152
Availability of technical equipment and support e.g. printers, scanners, photocopiers, Wifi	-.043	.070	.701	.158	.170	-.028
Updated bulletin boards/ ideas board	.256	.233	.562	.130	-.187	.431
Digital channel for the coworking space (e.g. blog, online community, Slack channel)	.281	.322	.528	.143	-.260	.229
Conversations with people working on similar projects to you	.142	.153	.236	.689	-.007	.045

Relationships with coworkers you can trust	.382	-.035	.145	.622	-.095	.109
Regular conversations with the same coworkers	.412	.025	-.137	.566	.012	-.092
Natural light	.104	.065	.088	-.162	.733	.046
Temperature	-.231	.236	.068	.280	.695	.088
Availability of individual desks	-.074	-.055	.430	-.002	.550	.141
Background noise	.091	.017	.121	-.010	.159	.767
Background music	.133	.204	-.124	.094	.068	.712
Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis. Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.						

Table 4. Rotated Component Matrix
(Source: Authors' own work)

Multiple regression analysis was undertaken using the six components and demographic control variables to predict the perceived importance of having a 'good vibe' in a CWS (Table 5). The overall model was statistically significant, $F(11, 130) = 7.604$, $p < .001$, explaining 39.1% of the variance in importance ratings ($R^2 = .391$, Adjusted $R^2 = .340$) which is considered substantively meaningful (Hair *et al.*, 2019). The Durbin-Watson statistic (1.963) indicated no concerns with autocorrelation. Two components emerged as significant positive predictors: Social community ($\beta = .416$, $p < .001$) and Communal spaces ($\beta = .419$, $p < .001$), suggesting that stronger social connections and better shared-space amenities are associated with a higher importance of a 'good vibe'. Trusted relationships also showed a smaller but still significant effect ($\beta = .159$, $p = .023$). However, Operational support ($\beta = .079$, $p = .255$), Physical comfort ($\beta = .094$, $p = .180$), and Soundscape ($\beta = -.004$, $p = .958$) were not significant predictors. None of the demographic controls (gender, age, coworking space usage, employment type, or location) made a significant contribution to the model (all $ps > .05$) showing no substantial impact on the ratings for 'good vibe' elements, which suggests the measures are universal. Multicollinearity diagnostics indicated no issues, with all VIF values between 1.017 and 1.204 (Hair *et al.*, 2019).

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients				
Model	B	SE	β	t	Sig.	Tolerance	VIF
(Constant)	3.786	.223		16.999	<.001		

Social community	.394	.068	.416	5.794	<.001	.909	1.100
Communal spaces	.394	.067	.419	5.870	<.001	.918	1.090
Operational support	.074	.065	.079	1.143	.255	.983	1.017
Trusted relationships	.150	.065	.159	2.308	.023	.982	1.018
Physical comfort	.089	.066	.094	1.349	.180	.955	1.047
Soundscape	-.003	.066	-.004	-.053	.958	.948	1.055
Gender	-.051	.135	-.027	-.377	.707	.939	1.065
Age	-.043	.139	-.022	-.306	.760	.898	1.113
CWS usage	-.088	.140	-.046	-.633	.528	.868	1.152
Employment type	.119	.153	.058	.779	.437	.830	1.204
Location	.228	.203	.082	1.126	.262	.880	1.136
R = .626, R-squared = .391, Adj. R-squared = 0.340, F Change = 7.604, df1 = 11, df2 = 130, Sig F Change = <.001, Durbin-Watson = 1.963							
a. Dependent Variable: Overall importance of the 'good vibe' in a CWS							

Table 5. Multiple Regression with control variables
(Source: Authors' own work)

Discussion

Using the coworkers' perspective as constructors of spaces, we will now examine the sociomaterial understanding of the prevalent material and social features along with the half-things, no-things and possibilities that could contribute towards creating a 'good vibe' in CWS.

At an explicit conscious level, CWS users primarily rated material elements as most important suggesting that atmospheres are more immediately perceived at a material level by coworkers as 'constructors of space' rather than sensing the space socially, relationally and considering the aesthetic practices (Jørgensen, 2019). Natural light (mean = 4.19) was rated as the most important element and has been considered by others as a key element of spatial design in CWS (Suharjanto *et al.*, 2020; Bouncken *et al.*, 2021) by providing connections to nature, the outside world and a sense of openness. This supports the findings of Bernhardt (2023) who found coworkers' preferred position was close to windows. The 'in-between' atmospheric lens that considers the possibilities and unrealised alternatives (Whitehead, 1968) of this connection to nature would suggest natural light also means not having to rely on artificial light, not feeling entirely alone, and not feeling trapped in undertaking the task at hand.

Communal areas (mean = 4.12), such as kitchens and coffee areas were the next most important contributor at this immediate level and although a material element of CWS in their construction they have a social, relational purpose. In their materiality, communal areas tend to have refreshment equipment (e.g. kettles, fridges, microwaves), breakfast bars, dining tables, high and low seating (Bouncken *et al.*, 2021). Socioculturally, they are interpreted as supporting time to take a break, replenish energy and dwell in the space alongside others, but also in creating the 'in-between' there is the possibility of a conversation, building a connection with a new or old acquaintance, taking your mind away from a work task so this can be approached with a fresh pair of eyes.

Other elements rated as important for creating a 'good vibe' at this explicit level were functional, material elements such as the availability of technical equipment (mean = 4.11), meeting rooms (mean = 4.04), individual desks (mean = 3.83) and different types of workspaces (mean = 3.88) and would suggest that coworkers as constructors of space are interpreting a 'good vibe' atmosphere as one that provides a conducive working experience. The fullness of their working needs are being prioritised, organised and managed and aligns with previous research that have considered CWS user needs and preferences (e.g. Rådman *et al.*, 2023; Weijs-Perrée *et al.*, 2019). Nevertheless, by prioritising these elements, they are also reducing the possibility of having to rely on a single workspace that offers no choice, potentially being unsuitable for taking calls due to disturbing others, includes too many distractions that focused work is impossible, and has inadequate broadband connection which means that emails and online meetings are compromised.

At the explicit, conscious level social elements and strategies make a lower contribution to creating a 'good vibe' (e.g. social events mean = 3.03; and conversations with new people mean = 3.28). However, the deeper, underlying analysis shows that social elements and strategies emerge as the strongest predictors of a 'good vibe' atmosphere through the components of Social community ($\beta = .416$, $p < .001$) - a combination of social elements and social strategies, and Communal spaces ($\beta = .419$, $p < .001$) - a blend of material elements and material strategies

The greatest contributor to Social Community is unsurprisingly having a sense of community ($\lambda = .763$) which is widely understood as being core to coworking arising from being co-present and the collective everyday practices in CWS (e.g. Garrett *et al.*, 2017). As one of the core values of coworking (Coworking.com, n.d), this result emphasises the importance that coworkers place on

being a community member rather than a consumer of a service (Bernhardt, 2023), of having affective relationality, mutual care, identity and a sense of belonging (Garrett *et al.*, 2017). By acting as community members this will also in turn reconstruct the atmosphere (Bernhardt, 2023), one that is perceived as a 'good vibe' and without this sense of community, coworkers would simply be a buyer of a service, partaking in a transactional relationship with an office space provider, working alone with little interaction outside of their (potentially online) colleagues.

Creating the sense of community is a social strategy curated by community hosts in their aesthetic work (Böhme, 1993). Other strategies include social events ($\lambda = .713$) and work related events ($\lambda = .658$) that socioculturally provide opportunities for coworkers to gain a sense of informality, choice and individual power (Blagoev *et al.*, 2019) through social interaction, knowledge sharing and collaboration (Parrino, 2015). Events are important in facilitating interactions in CWS, bringing together members around particular topics for work-related events, or occasions for social events (Aslam *et al.*, 2021). They support a collective experience and affective relationality (Jørgensen, 2019; de Vaujany, 2025); provide spatial and temporal rhythms to everyday organising (Feldman and Worline, 2016) as well as a source of variation in the work experience. In valuing the possibilities of events, the unrealised alternatives should also be considered in understanding the 'in-between' such as a monotony of tasks solely focussed on one's work, strained interactions with no common focus and little opportunity to step back from the 'day-job' to consider alternative approaches.

Talking to coworkers or facilitating introductions are part of the curatorial practice of coworking hosts (Merkel, 2015). In this context, CWS can be described as serendipity accelerators (Orel and Alonso Almeida, 2019), designed to increase the likelihood of encounters and social interactions (Bernhardt, 2023; Jakonen *et al.*, 2017; Merkel, 2015). The desire to interact or socialise with other coworkers is an important reason that brings many coworkers to work in CWS (Spinuzzi, 2012). Through conversations, encounters are translated into meaningful social interactions, like informal interactions, direct social support (exchanging information, instrumental support) or collaboration (Gerdenitsch *et al.*, 2016). Conversations - whether planned ($\lambda = .627$) or unplanned ($\lambda = .758$), with other coworkers or with the community manager ($\lambda = .711$) - are core elements of the component Social Community. As shown in the quote at the start of this paper the sounds of conversations were cited as a part of the 'massive buzz', and their distinct absence when the 'buzz' had gone. However, as an explicit element in

this research, the sound of conversations and soundscape in CWS was not regarded as important (mean = 2.59), as was previously found by Orel and Alonso Almeida (2019). It must therefore be the act of participating in conversations that creates the 'good vibe' rather than simply the sound. Without the action, aesthetic practice and relations of bodies in conversation, the atmosphere would feel more formalised, restrictive and silent, elevating the sound of 'doing work' (e.g. tapping of the keyboard) and 'being present' (e.g. sounds of swallowing, breathing and rumbling bodies) which could create a fear of disturbance or judgement by others.

Material elements and strategies that create Communal Spaces also make a significant contribution to a 'good vibe' atmosphere and comprise of some of the elements identified by coworkers at the explicit, conscious level that provide a conducive 'full' working experience. However, material elements focused on supporting social interactions were in the majority including spaces focussed on non-work activities ($\lambda = .650$) and larger desks ($\lambda = .566$). Sociomaterially, the larger desk has the material affordance of space for several people to use at the same time, and socioculturally this suggests being open to conversations and adapting working practices accordingly (Suckley and Marsh-Davies, 2026). The atmospheric lens (de Vaujany, 2025; Giovannoni and Quattrone, 2025; Jørgensen and Beyes, 2023) would consider that without these communal spaces, the focus would solely be on completing work-related tasks, with actions being centred around a work device or leaving the CWS for refreshments and mingling with non-CWS users. By appreciating the value of communal areas as part of a 'good vibe', users are also bringing in these unrealised alternatives. The material strategy of open plan design ($\lambda = .559$) was also part of this component and has been found by others to be a key design of CWS (Orel and Bennis, 2021). Socioculturally, this strategy suggests openness (Turco, 2016) through a higher degree of visibility and accessibility (Bouncken and Aslam, 2023) that facilitates encounters and a sense of belonging through co-presence. Working spaces devoid of an open plan layout would provide more private working spaces, where interruptions and distractions are minimised which in turn can support greater levels of concentration and arguably greater productivity (Haynes *et al.*, 2019). However, this layout would defeat the purpose of using spaces that support coworking.

Our research has focused on CWS users as perceiving subjects that are sense-making the material and social elements and strategies that are part of CWS in their construction, using their values, experiences and sociocultural understanding to interpret and contribute to the 'in-between' that is a 'good vibe' atmosphere. Given

this relational, individualised focus, some variation across users was expected, however, our research found that demographics such as gender ($\beta = -.027$, $p > .001$), age ($\beta = -.022$, $p > .001$) and geographic location ($\beta = .082$, $p > .001$) had no significant impact on the perceived composition, nor did employment type ($\beta = .058$, $p > .001$) or level of CWS usage ($\beta = -.046$, $p > .001$). Social Community and Communal Spaces can therefore be considered as universal key components sensed to create a 'good vibe' atmosphere in CWS. With little research undertaken on atmospheres in CWS, it is difficult to compare this universality with previous research. Further research is encouraged to explore this in more depth, quantitatively with a greater sample size that offers the required diversity especially in terms of geographic location and employment type given distinct cultural differences.

Conclusion

Atmospheres are what hits us when entering a room and how the space makes us feel. In this research, we have examined CWS atmospheres and specifically a 'good vibe' atmosphere that has been identified by others as important for CWS users (Appel-Meulenbroek *et al.*, 2021; Endrissat and Leclercq-Vandelannoitte, 2021) to encourage repeat usage that is core to the success of these shared working spaces. Using a combined sociomateriality and atmospheric lens, we identify the sociocultural understanding of the social and material elements and strategies that contribute to the 'in-between' 'good vibe' atmosphere.

At an explicit, conscious level, CWS users identified several material elements as most important for a 'good vibe' atmosphere suggesting that this type of atmosphere is more immediately perceived at a material level rather than sensing the space socially or relationally. Natural light, communal areas and different working spaces were considered most important. However, deeper underlying analysis showed that it is the social elements and strategies forming social communities that are at the heart of a 'good vibe' atmosphere, supported by material elements and strategies for communal spaces.

This research has shown that there is an implicit, unconscious appreciation of the social purpose of coworking needed for creating a 'good vibe' atmosphere. Sense of community, social and work related events and conversations are the core components that provide opportunities for conversations and contributions as a community member. This is in contrast to completing work in a space focussed solely on work tasks, as a consumer of a service, with little spatial or temporal rhythm, and strained interactions with minimal others. By considering the 'half-things' and 'no-things' alternative possibilities of not having these relational opportunities,

the understanding of the 'in-between' that is a 'good vibe' atmosphere has greater clarity. These social elements are supported by material elements/ strategies such as communal areas for longer and more relaxed conversations and open plan design that allows for visibility and accessibility rather than working in a private working space without disturbances or interruptions, and greater inconvenience by seeking outside refreshment. The role of the coworking host as an aesthetic worker is to execute these social strategies and undertake the staging work throughout the CWS. It is the combination of these social and material elements and strategies focussed on social community and communal spaces that is fundamental to 'good vibe' atmospheres.

To support the creation of such atmospheres in CWS and assist with the development of successful shared working spaces that have returning users, we can make several recommendations. To build a sense of community, there needs to be communal spaces such as kitchens, coffee areas that encourage interactions and spaces to dwell. There should also be co-location opportunities in work areas through providing larger desks and open plan design. The coworking hosts' aesthetic work should be focused on creating environments for social interactions and community-building, such as organising social events like breakfast clubs or birthday clubs.

With this research, we make several contributions. Firstly, to the theoretical field we extend the sociomateriality perspective that suggests complete things and their entanglements, by adding an atmospheric lens to consider the 'in-between' and 'no-things' that are neither fully material nor purely subjective. The conceptual model of the elusive 'good vibe' atmosphere uses a sociomaterial lens to explore the relationality between the social and material, and to this we add the 'no-things' possibilities to understanding the 'in-between' which adds a more comprehensive analysis. Methodologically, we contribute a quantitative approach to examining the nature of CWS atmospheres that has reached a large sample across a wide geographical area which has allowed statistical analysis to uncover both explicit and implicit interpretations of what contributes to a 'good vibe'.

As with all research, there are limitations. The main limitation here was the sample size and data collection time. Although 148 CWS users participated, a larger sample would have allowed more analysis into sociocultural interpretations and to establish the true universality of the findings. The data was also collected over an 11-month period and there will undoubtedly have been changes in the CWS offer during this time that may have not been fully captured.

We would encourage future research to further develop the 'good vibe' concept, as the findings revealed it operates at two distinct levels: an explicit, conscious appreciation of material elements and a deeper, implicit understanding centred on social purpose. This complexity warrants additional investigation to fully unpack how coworkers construct and experience atmospheres in shared workspaces, and support CWS with the strategies that they employ for their continued operation.

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